

# *FY 2018 Year in Review*

No Veteran Ever Dies



Cave Hill National Cemetery  
in Louisville, Kentucky

**VA**



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
National Cemetery Administration



Key Numbers in FY 2018

136	VA national cemeteries
135,306	Interments at VA national cemeteries
112	State, territorial, and tribal Veteran cemeteries
39,401	Interments at state, territory or tribal Veterans Cemeteries
364,698	Headstones, Markers, and Medallions issued
517,858	Presidential Memorial Certificates provided to loved ones
92 percent	Veterans have access to a Veteran’s cemetery within 75 miles of their home



Cover photos: Cave Hill National Cemetery in Louisville, Kentucky  
The Red Poppies. Remembrance poppies have been used since 1921 to commemorate military personnel who have died in war. Inspired by the World War I poem “In Flanders Fields”, and promoted by American Professor and Humanitarian, Moina Michael, they were first adopted by the American Legion to commemorate American soldiers killed in that war.

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IT’S BEEN SAID WE ALL DIE TWO DEATHS  
THE FIRST WHEN BREATH LEAVES US  
FOR THE VERY LAST TIME.  
THE SECOND IS SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE  
WHEN OUR NAME IS SPOKEN OR OUR  
STORY IS TOLD FOR THE VERY LAST TIME.  
IT IS THE SECOND DEATH THAT  
WE ARE COMMITTED TO ENSURING  
NEVER HAPPENS TO OUR VETERANS.





## Year in Review Message

It's been quite a year for NCA and I become more and more impressed with each of you every day. This past year has been a big one for us. The Partnership for Public Service's Best Places to Work (BPTW) recognized our organization and we increased engagement by 9 points and now rank 106 (up from 225) out of 415 government subcomponents. This places us within the top 25 percent of best places to work for subcomponents. The Southeast District was recognized as Highest Scoring in NCA and NCA Pacific District received NCA's Most Improved award. I'm extremely pleased with our rankings and look forward to only improving even more.

Regarding ratings, our customer service numbers remain strong and higher than anyone in the nation. 99 percent agreed our cemetery appearance is excellent, 99 percent would recommend our services to others, and 97 percent agreed our service was excellent. That number is up one percent from last year. It's hard to beat those numbers, but we must always strive to achieve 100 percent.

We continue to honor and care for our Veterans and their families every day, no matter what obstacles may come our way, including inclement weather. We've maintained our vision and sacred mission, to preserve the legacy and ensure no Veteran ever truly dies as we continue to provide access to our Veterans, and maintain our valued partnerships.

Over the past year, I visited over 60 cemeteries, all the way from the Pacific, up to Vermont and our Northern states, and all the way down to Texas, and I look forward to visiting more and meeting more of our NCA team members in the field. In the coming months and looking to the future, we will be bringing online new cemeteries that will provide more and more access. We expect to deliver and complete construction this year at Fargo National Cemetery in North Dakota, which is a part of our rural initiative. Construction will begin on a new Urban initiative in the Indianapolis area at Crown Hill, which we recently closed on the land for. And we are in the process of constructing another cemetery which is a rural initiative in Rhinelander, Wisconsin. We are consistently working on other sites and expanding our existing cemeteries to ensure that our Veterans have the access and the service that they have earned and that they deserve.

I thank each NCA team member for your outstanding work in carrying out our three priorities and all you do to serve our Veterans every day. Let's make this year another one for the record book.

Randy Reeves  
Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs





Patriot Plaza, Sarasota National Cemetery, Sarasota, Florida

NO VETERAN EVER DIES

**THE STORY OF WHITFIELD EVANS, UNION SOLDIER, BURIED AT DANVILLE IN VIRGINIA**

Whitfield Evans, a 29-year-old farm laborer from Illinois, answered the call during the Civil War. He was assigned to the 112th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment. In September 1862, the 112th mustered into service with the Wyoming Volunteers, Company E.

On July 28, 1863, Evans was captured as part of an assault against Confederate troops advancing on Richmond, Kentucky. The Confederates had no means to retain prisoners, so Evans and his comrades were released on parole. Evans rejoined the Union army. On September 27, 1863, following the Battle of Chickamauga, the Confederates captured the military hospital in Athens, Tennessee which housed 11 men from the 112th Illinois including Evans. Realizing, he was a parolee who had taken up arms without having been exchanged, Evans most likely feared for his life. From capture until his death, Evans assumed his brother-in-law's name, John Robinson.

On March 21, 1864, Evans died while a prisoner of war. He was buried under the name of “J Robinson” in Grave No. 646 in what was to become Danville National Cemetery, Virginia.

Following many years of diligent research conducted by the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) and historians from academia, Evans’ true identity was verified.

On October 12, 2018, a new headstone was placed on Grave No. 646 at Danville National Cemetery, which still reads “J. Robinson,” on the front and now “a.k.a. Whitfield Evans” on the back.

**WOMEN VETERANS SERVED IN THE GREAT WAR**

The Yeoman (F)s, popularly called ‘Yeomanettes’ to their objection, were established by Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels in 1917 after the U.S. entered World War I.

At the time, the Navy was the only service branch within the U.S. armed forces to enlist women for service in a similar status with men. The expanding mission of the Navy and Marine Corps prompted a need for more clerks and stenographers as male Sailors and Marines were being deployed for duty at sea and abroad.

The Army recruited and trained women as well. They served overseas in France as telephone operators during the war, the occupation of Germany, and the Paris Peace Conference. Known affectionately as the “Hello Girls,” they were denied Veteran status until 1977.

Two Navy Yeomanettes, Lulu Hogue and Estelle Edwards, are buried at Alexandria National Cemetery. Melina Olive Shaw, an Army Hello Girl who lived to receive her discharge, was the first burial at Massachusetts National Cemetery in 1980.



**NCA PRODUCES “NO VETERAN EVER DIES” VIDEO**

On Memorial Day 2018, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Randy Reeves visited Los Angeles National Cemetery. While there, he spoke at the Memorial Day event, visited with Scouts and other volunteer groups, and participated in the filming of the No Veteran Ever Dies video that can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsfWpod2vgM>.

**USS OKLAHOMA SAILOR BURIED AT JEFFERSON BARRACKS**

Navy Seaman 1st Class Natale I. Torti, 19, of St. Louis, Missouri, accounted for by the Defense POW-MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) on April 26, 2018, was buried October 12 at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in Missouri. On Dec. 7, 1941, Torti was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crew members, including Torti. Prior to identification, he had been interred as an Unknown at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP).

**REMEMBERING BUFFALO SOLDIER: ROY MCCAIN OF LOUISIANA**

Roy McCain enlisted in the U.S. Army and served with Troop F, 9th U.S. Cavalry. Private McCain was honorably discharged in 1933. As a civilian, he worked as a spokesperson, living in New Mexico and Texas. He died in 1944 and was buried at Fort Bliss National Cemetery, El Paso, Texas. Buffalo Soldiers was the nickname given to black soldiers who served in segregated infantry and cavalry regiments after the Civil War. The name is believed to have originated with Native Americans who fought against black soldiers in the Indian Wars.



# PIKES PEAK NATIONAL CEMETERY DEDICATED

NCA hosted a dedication ceremony for Pikes Peak National Cemetery on Friday, May 25, 2018. Pikes Peak National Cemetery is a new 374-acre VA national cemetery in the southeast portion of Colorado Springs. The cemetery will serve the burial needs of more than 95,000 Veterans and their spouses in the cemetery's service area for the next 100 years. Pikes Peak National Cemetery takes its name from the highest summit of the southern Front Range of the Rocky Mountains, located just 12 miles from downtown Colorado Springs. We partner with communities and organizations to raise the national profile and importance of the American civic tradition of honoring Veterans through memorialization.

Over 92 percent of Veterans have access to a VA national, state, territory, or tribal Veterans cemetery within 75 miles of their home.

ACCESS



## LOUISIANA TO ESTABLISH VETERANS CEMETERY IN JENNINGS

NCA recently awarded the state of Louisiana a \$7.28 million grant to establish the Southwest Louisiana Veterans Cemetery near the city of Jennings. This grant will develop 12.6 acres and fund the construction of a main entrance, an administration building, maintenance facility, 1,212 pre-placed crypts, 185 cremains gravesites, and 380 columbarium niches. When complete, the cemetery will serve 37,600 Louisiana Veteran and their eligible family members.

## VETERANS IN MAINE WILL GET A GREEN BURIAL OPTION

The Maine Veterans' Cemetery System, which has four state-run cemeteries, plans to make more burial options available to Veterans, their spouses and other eligible family members. Green Burials avoid coffins and embalming in favor of preserving the natural landscape.

## KILLEEN VETERANS CEMETERY GETTING NEEDED GRANT THANKS TO VA

The state of Texas was recently awarded a \$2.65 million grant to fund the expansion of the Central Texas State Cemetery in Killeen. The grant will fund the construction of 3,000 columbarium niches and an improved cortege lane. Without the Columbarium, the cemetery would have depleted in January 2019.

## JEFFERSON BARRACKS NATIONAL CEMETERY (JBNC) EXPANDS

VA acquired 33.64 acres of land adjacent to JBNC to continue to offer burial access to St. Louis-area Veterans and their families. JBNC currently depletes casketed sites in 2028. The new property is projected to add 15-20 years of burial capacity beyond 2028.

## SISSETON-WAHPETON SIOUX VETERANS CEMETERY DEDICATED

NCA helped dedicate South Dakota's 3rd tribal Veterans cemetery on July 12, 2018. This cemetery also marked the 111th VA grant-funded cemetery.



# LIVING AT A NATIONAL CEMETERY

Fifty-five of NCA national cemeteries have lodges on property. In some cases, they are used as administration buildings or by Veteran Service Organizations. In [five cases](#), like Fort Rosecrans or San Francisco National Cemetery, the lodge is used as a full-time residence for employees.

Point Loma, Fort Rosecrans  
National Cemetery

## ONE OF THE BEST VIEWS

Graham Wright has one of the best views. When he walks out his front door, he sees the history. But it's the back-door view that is truly breathtaking.

"In front of me are the rolling hills with all the headstones," said Wright. "I can see San Diego Harbor to my left and the Pacific Ocean off in the distance. I could look at the ocean all day long."

Wright, a retired U.S. Navy Veteran and a 2014 graduate of NCA's year-long Cemetery Director Internship Program course, is the Assistant Director for Fort Rosecrans and Miramar National Cemeteries in San Diego, California. He and his family live in the historic lodge located at Fort Rosecrans.

Wright remembers the national cemetery from when he was stationed in San Diego. "Now I have the best commute in the area," he says. "At first, I got mixed reactions from friends and family when I told them we were going to live on the cemetery grounds," remembered Wright. "People look at you a little strange, then when they visit, they want to live here."



The historic lodge at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery in San Diego was built in 1936 and is significant as the prototype for Southwestern Ranch style of lodge design.

## LODGES DATE BACK TO THE END OF THE CIVIL WAR

Lodges on cemetery grounds date back to immediately after the end of the Civil War, when national cemeteries were being built around the country to provide a final resting place of dignity, honor, and respect for the fallen. The initial period of temporary-frame lodge construction went from 1867 to 1869 and overlapped with the construction of the first permanent masonry lodges. A one-and-one-half-story, L-plan house with mansard roof in the Second Empire style was refined over a two-year period before civil engineer Thomas P. Chiffelle drew a definitive version of it in 1871. The first of this style is at Richmond National Cemetery in Virginia. In the 1870s, the army built L-plan lodges with mansard roofs in dozens of national cemeteries. The design was altered in 1885-1895 before being abandoned completely.

From the 1920s through 1940s, lodge construction used typical suburban house forms as well as revival-style and neoclassical designs intended to match lodges to their local settings. New lodge construction ceased around 1960. Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery in San Diego, California, pictured above, was built in 1936, and is significant as the prototype for Southwestern Ranch style of lodge design.

In another example, the desire to match designs to localities prompted the alteration of the revised L-plan lodge built at San Francisco National Cemetery in 1885 into a Spanish Mission Revival building in 1929. The survival of the San Francisco lodge is especially significant because it represents the first departure from the L-plan design as the Army Quartermaster's office sought to integrate the living quarters of the cemetery superintendents into the trends shaping residential architecture in the twentieth century. Today, NCA has 55 lodges, the oldest dating back to 1870.



A view of the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco National Cemetery.

## THEY GET PULLED BY THE HISTORY

Kathy McCall knows the feeling of living in a historic lodge at a VA national cemetery very well. For the past 11 years, she has been the main lodge resident at the San Francisco National Cemetery, also known as the Presidio. A graduate of NCA's inaugural Cemetery Director Intern Program class in 2005, she jumped at the chance to live on the cemetery grounds.

"My views are magnificent," said McCall, who is also the Director of nearby Golden Gate National Cemetery. "Rows and rows of historic headstones and then, off in the distance, the spires of the Golden Gate Bridge, the bay, and Alcatraz."

While appreciating the beautiful panoramas and landscapes, these Cemetery Directors are driven in their mission to serve Veterans, their families, and the public. Living on the cemetery grounds makes that easier to do.

"We have many visitors," said McCall. "They appreciate the beautiful setting and get pulled in by the history."



# SALUTING BRANCHES 2018

On September 19, 2018, Saluting Branches saw over 3,000 volunteers donate their time and talent to care for trees at 53 VA national cemeteries across 37 states.



Leavenworth National Cemetery in Kansas



“There are two kinds of heroes,  
those who have served in uniform,  
and those who serve Veterans.”

Randy Reeves  
Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs



## VCGP CELEBRATES 40 YEARS

NCA's Veterans Cemetery Grants Program celebrated its 40th anniversary at the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs annual convention on August 26-28, 2018. Since 1978, Veterans Cemetery Grants Program has provided over \$816 million in grants to assist states, territories, and tribal governments to establish and maintain 112 Veteran cemeteries. The 112th state Veterans cemetery opened on Veterans Day 2018 in Duluth, MN. It's one of the most successful partnerships in all the federal government.



## MIAP SPONSORS INTERMENTS AT QUANTICO

On October 15, 2018, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Randy Reeves, attended an interment ceremony sponsored by the Missing in America Project (MIAP). MIAP sponsored six interments at Quantico in FY2018 and 123 since the program began in May 2012. MIAP's mission is to identify and inter unclaimed remains of American Veterans. Veterans from WWII, Korea, and Vietnam participated in the ceremony that was sponsored by the Honor Flight Network.



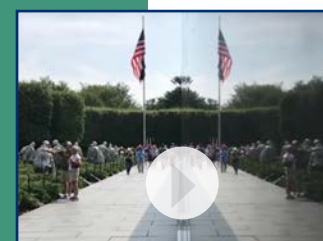
## NACVSO PARTNERS WITH VA TO HELP VETERANS

On June 8, 2018, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Randy Reeves, addressed the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO). NACVSO represents approximately 2,400 county and state employees from 29 states and several Native American Tribes to speed the process of VA claims development to include burial benefits.



## CARRY THE LOAD

On May 6, 2018, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Randy Reeves, welcomed representatives from Carry The Load at Annapolis National Cemetery (ANC). They stopped at ANC as part of their 6,600 mile East and West Coast relay to honor the fallen. Founded in 2011 by two Navy SEAL Veterans, Carry The Load began as a 20- hour and 11-minute Memorial Walk. What started as a mission to restore the true meaning of Memorial Day has broadened to bring Americans together to participate in honoring our nation's heroes every day.



## LOST-FOUND-RETURNED

A poignant story of how NCA and the Department of Defense's POW/MIA Accounting Agency partner to bring home and honor Service members still unaccounted for from battlefields across the globe: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lw2zb\\_ReY4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lw2zb_ReY4)



# MORE THAN A HEADSTONE

The University of Denver (DU) hosted an exhibit through the Veterans Legacy Program that shared the stories of dozens of Veterans interred at Fort Logan National Cemetery. DU students gained a better understanding of larger narratives in U.S. history through the personalized research of individual Veterans. The narratives discovered through their research include topics such as how wartime service shaped American families over generations, and how Veterans continued to serve their communities and country after military service.



*More Than a Headstone: The Lives and Legacies of Veterans at Ft. Logan National Cemetery. On-site exhibit at University of Denver Library.*

“As a result of my research, I was able to bring my Veteran’s story back to life.”

—Student in the Veterans Legacy Program

## Veterans Legacy Program At A Glance

- 9 Partnerships
- 55 Professors
- 200 Undergraduates
- 260 K-12 Teachers
- 4,000 K-12 Students Reached

### LEGACY PROGRAM GROWS

Veterans Legacy Program expanded into over 30 national, state, and tribal cemeteries through nine partnerships last year. Additionally, three partners found stories of World War I Veterans interred in ABMC cemeteries overseas. In total, nearly a thousand stories of Veterans were discovered and brought to life by students and teachers at the university and K-12 levels.



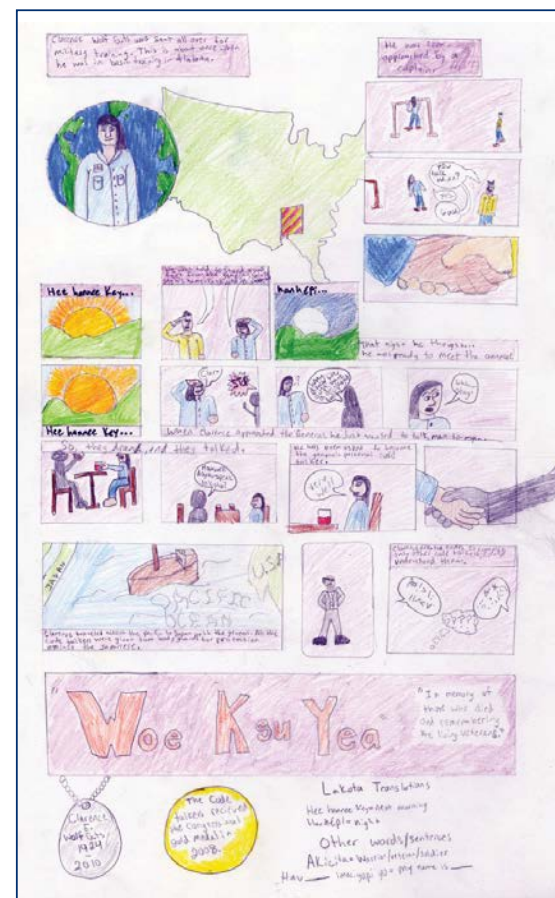
### MEMORIALIZING THE ENSHRINED AT RIVERSIDE

University of California, Riverside partnered with local K-12 schools to create a collection of tributes for Veterans interred at Riverside National Cemetery. In a book produced for the cemetery, titled *Along the Chaparral: Memorializing the Enshrined at Riverside National Cemetery*, the lives of over 70 Veterans are commemorated in the forms of biography, poetry, and other creative forms of writing. These tributes were produced by local area middle school and high school students in Riverside Unified School District, Beaumont Unified School District, Temecula Valley Unified School District, and Sherman Indian High School.



### STUDENTS SHARE STORIES OF SERVICE THROUGH GRAPHIC NOVELS

Over the summer, Black Hills State University (BHSU) hosted a Historical Graphic Novel Academy for middle and high school students as part of their partnership with the Veterans Legacy Program. Using the stories of Veterans interred at Black Hills National Cemetery, students took biographies written by BHSU students and turned them into graphic novels. Their work was displayed at an espresso shop in Spearfish, South Dakota. One of these Veterans was Pfc. Clarence E. Wolf Guts, a Lakota Code talker who served in the Pacific Campaigns of World War II. His story was told by a student who became so immersed in storytelling, that he even included text written in the Lakota language.



Code talkers were bilingual Native Americans recruited by the U.S. military in WWI and WWII to utilize a little-known language as a means of secret communication.



# It was called the Great War, the war to end all wars.

Over 116,000 Americans lost their lives by the time the war ended on November 11, 1918. Many are still buried at American cemeteries in France, Belgium, and the United Kingdom.

During the war, Blue Stars were hung in the windows of homes where a member of the family was serving in the armed forces. If an individual died in the war, the Blue Star was covered with a Gold Star signifying the sacrifice of one's life for their country. Soon, groups of mothers who lost their children in the war emerged to show support for each other and for soldiers who returned from the war. In St. Louis, the "Gold Star Mothers" was led by Mrs. Frank de Garmo, who also led the National Society of 1917 World War Registrars.

After the war, the St. Louis Gold Star Mothers and the National Society of 1917 World War Registrars organized an effort to honor their sons and daughters who died in service by promoting the building of the Gold Star Court of Honor. In cooperation with the parks department of the City of St. Louis, "Memory" trees were planted in the grassy medians of Kingshighway Boulevard beginning at Easton Avenue (now Martin Luther King Drive) on Arbor Day 1923. Later, 8-inch round bronze plaques were cast for each St. Louis service member who perished. A total of 1,185 plaques were placed flush with the ground in front of the memorial trees and at other locations along Kingshighway as far as Florissant Avenue.

By the 1980s, construction along Kingshighway required the removal of the plaques. That's when Legionnaires from the Rollo-Calcaterra American Legion Post 15 organized their ranks and collected plaques that were still in the medians. Of the original 1,185 plaques, 752 were saved, restored and are incorporated into the striking memorial pictured below at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in Missouri. For 30 years, the plaques needed a new home. Finally, in March 2012, VA accepted a donation for a new monument. Following a groundbreaking in May, all of the construction and monument work was complete in time for the September 30, 2012 dedication.



WWI monument at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery, St. Louis, Missouri.



## LEGACY DAY HAS BIG TURNOUT

On November 14, 2018, NCA hosted a department-wide Legacy Day at its Central Office in Washington, DC attended by VA Secretary Robert Wilkie and other dignitaries. Attendees, including three former senior NCA leaders, learned about NCA's Veterans Legacy Program, History Program, and the organization's exciting public engagement work to raise NCA's profile and promote awareness of its burial benefits and services.

## MORE VETERANS THAN EVER ARE USING VA BURIAL AND MEMORIAL BENEFITS

Interments at VA national cemeteries were up by almost 2,000 (135,306), while internments at State, Territory, and Tribal Veterans cemeteries were up by over 1,000 (39,401) burials. The total number of headstones, markers and medallions provided increased by nearly 3,000 (364,698).

## CUSTOMER SERVICE NUMBERS STILL IN THE HIGH 90S

99 percent of customer satisfaction survey respondents said the appearance of the VA national cemetery was excellent, while 99 percent also said they would recommend NCA to other Veterans, 97 percent reported the service they received was excellent, moving 1 percent closer to perfection from the prior year's results.

## SAFETY, A TOP PRIORITY

Safety at every VA national cemetery is a high priority. In FY2018, NCA's Safety team exceeded the Department of Labor goals in Total Case Rate, Timeliness of filing Injury and Illness Notices, and Timeliness of filing Wage Loss Claims. They improved the Return to Work cases by finding other suitable, light duties and reducing costs by almost 3 percent to save NCA more than \$70,000.

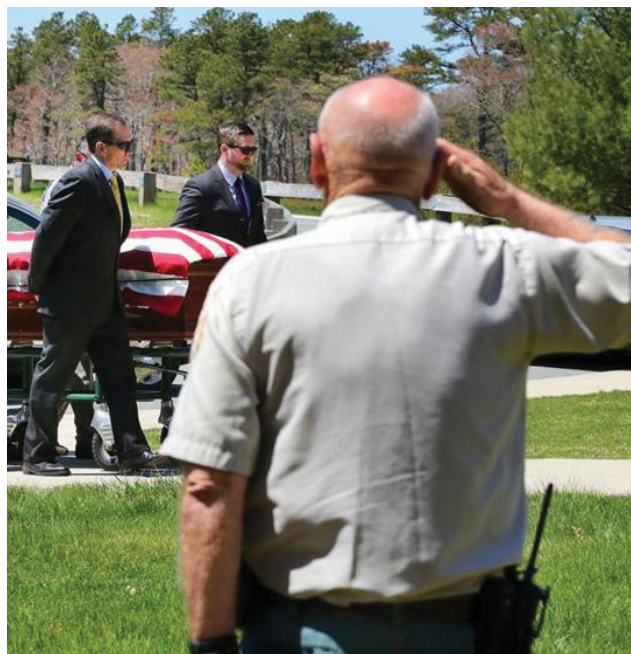
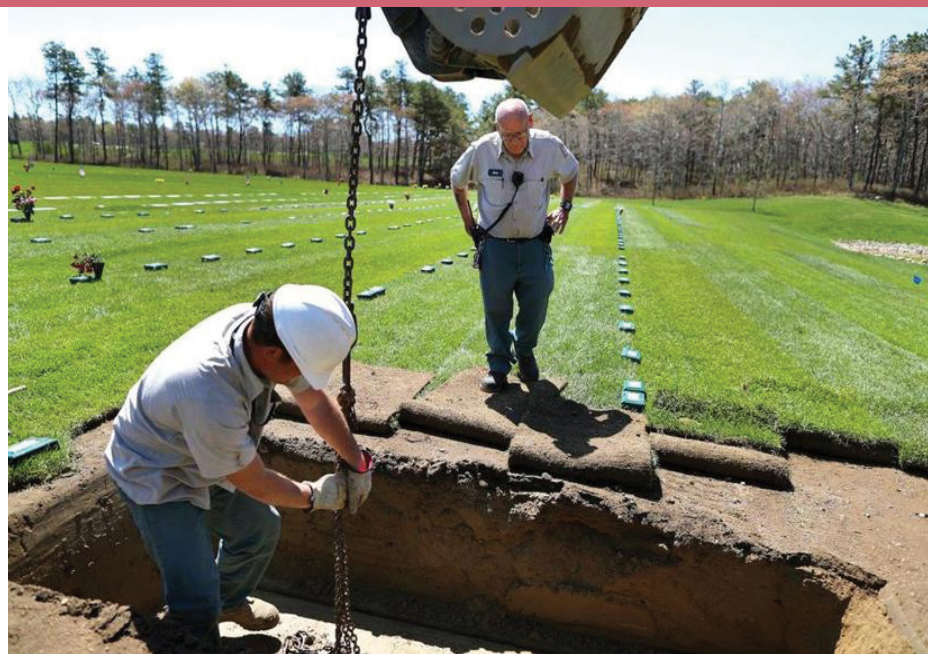


## MEDAL OF HONOR MEDALLION RECOGNIZES THOSE BURIED IN PRIVATE CEMETERIES

NCA's Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials led the effort to design a Medal of Honor (MOH) medallion for those recipients buried in private cemeteries. NCA presented the first MOH medallion on November 2, 2018 to honor Army PFC Milton Lee Olive III who was killed in Vietnam and buried at West Grove Cemetery in Lexington, Mississippi.



# CREATING A RESTING PLACE BEFITTING A HERO



**He dug his first grave the old-fashioned way.** One careful shovelful after another. Through a layer of dark topsoil. And then several feet of the caramel-colored clay. Finally, a hole in the ground. A sacred place of deep gratitude, respect, and eternal rest.

He wanted to get the feel of the soil. He wanted to get the corners precise. The graves here belong to heroes. And heroes, he said, have earned perfect symmetry and the truest alignment.

“It takes extreme self-restraint,” Bob Gardner tells me, standing over a freshly dug grave at the Massachusetts National Cemetery here. “People driving by think it’s easy, but it’s not. It’s not easy to train someone to do that.”

Construction people dig holes. They just dig, dig, dig. You can’t do it that way here. There’s a difference. It’s similar to what surgeons do. It’s got to be surgically correct.”

**Surgically correct.** That’s been Bob Gardner’s workplace ethos since he first walked onto the cemetery’s hallowed grounds here shortly after its dedication in 1980.

He arrives early. Leaves late. He knows every inch of this breathtakingly beautiful place — a place of pine and oak trees, of winding roads and sloping landscapes. It’s a place where the Kentucky bluegrass is trimmed to a uniform height of 3 inches, where through merciless winters and the brutal heat of summer, some 50 burials a week are conducted with ramrod precision — privates accorded the same respect as generals.

“They have their rank but they’re not treated any differently because of what their rank was,” Gardner, 73, said during a break from his job of nearly 40 years. “Everybody is the same here.”

Bob Gardner, the son of a World War I Purple Heart recipient, is getting ready for another Memorial Day now.

He’s done it all here. He’s buried Medal of Honor recipients. He’s watched a heartbroken young mother, an Air Force veteran, tearfully commit her stillborn infant to the grave. He’s heard the echo of taps countless times through the rustling trees and emerald hills.

Along the way, the Vietnam War veteran has earned the respect of the more than two dozen employees here committed to excellence.

“He’s our go-to guy. He’s been here since Day One,” said Brian Matson, 57, who worked alongside Gardner for nearly 20 years burying veterans and their family members before Gardner became his boss, or “work leader.”

**Work leader.** It’s a term that means gravedigger, foreman, and keeper of institutional knowledge.

“Bob treats every burial with the utmost dignity,” Matson told me, sitting at the controls of a small backhoe, ready for another interment. “He’s the first one here. He’s the last one to leave. He’s like the old-school guy. He works, works, works.”

The cemetery’s acting director is Richard Wallace. After retiring as chief master sergeant in the Air Force, he was looking to continue service to his country in a second career.

“This is a home,” he said. “This is the final location of our veterans, and to send them off in an honorable, dignified manner, it means a lot to me. Because I know one day I’m going to be in a cemetery.”

Wallace, a 54-year-old New Jersey native, started here two years ago. When he met Gardner for the first time, he didn’t quite know what to make of the guy.

“I was like: ‘Who’s that old guy? Why is he not in Florida enjoying the weather somewhere?’” Wallace recalled. “Then you talk to him. Very sharp guy top to bottom. His body isn’t what it used to be, and he’ll tell you that. But when you need information about something, a burial, he knows.”

**Yes. Bob Gardner knows.** Drafted in 1966, he spent his year in Vietnam in Cu Chi, a suburban district of what was then Saigon. “You just do what you have to survive,” he said of his wartime service, which was followed by 30 years in the National Guard.

He knows where the remains of Richard David DeWert lie. DeWert, a Navy hospital corpsman, was killed in South Korea on April 5, 1951, when the Taunton native was attached to the First Marine Division. Just 19 when he died, he received the Medal of Honor for “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty.”

As we stood over that hero’s grave the other day under a cobalt blue, springtime sky, Gardner’s eyes filled with tears. His voice caught. There is nothing — he makes clear — rote about the work he’s performed tens of thousands of times now.

The National Cemetery here also holds the remains of Major General Charles W. Sweeney of Lowell. He flew the B-29 Superfortress that dropped the atomic bomb on Nagasaki, the

second atom bomb strike on Japan in the twilight of World War II. Sweeney, who lived in Milton, died in 2004 at the age of 84.

An unknown US soldier from the Civil War lies here in section 5, grave 107. His remains were discovered during highway excavation in South Carolina in the 1980s. The buttons on his uniform identified him as a member of the Massachusetts Voluntary Infantry. He was buried here on Aug. 4, 1990.

The first person buried here — section 1, grave 1 — was Melina Olive Shaw. She was an Army private and a military telephone operator. She was 90 when she died and was buried on Oct. 14, 1980.

And now it was time for the cemetery to receive another veteran — Laurence A. Phillips, an Air Force veteran who grew up in Quincy and lived in West Bridgewater. He died on May 4.

Gardner, who recently had both hips replaced, stood off to one side. Mourners filed under a wooden canopy. There was a brief prayer and the sound of taps. An Air Force sergeant lifted the US flag from the coffin and folded it into a triangle, its creases sharp and true.

And then they presented it on behalf of a grateful nation to Patricia Sprague of Kingston, Mr. Phillips’s niece.

Bob Gardner’s attention to detail and meticulousness did not go unnoticed.

“He’s so kindhearted,” Sprague told me, holding the Stars and Stripes against her chest. “He’s so dedicated. People like Bob are going to maintain my uncle’s dignity.”

As the funeral cortege drove away, Bob Gardner helped as Mr. Phillips’s coffin was prepared for burial.

He collected bouquets of fresh yellow flowers and made sure they would follow the old Air Force veteran to his final resting place.

It was the respectful and dignified thing to do.

It’s the kind of thing that still brings tears to Bob Gardner’s eyes.

*This story first appeared on May 25, 2018, in the Boston Globe and was written by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Thomas Farragher.*



## PACIFIC

PACIFIC NO VETERAN EVER DIES  
MAY 30, 2018

An estimated 10,000 Scouts, parents, and members of the community placed 88,000 flags at Los Angeles National Cemetery to remember the fallen on Memorial Day and ensuring that “No Veteran Ever Dies.” The National Cemetery Administration actively partners with communities and organizations to raise the national profile and focus on the importance of the American civic tradition of honoring Veterans through memorialization. Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Randy Reeves attended the event and while there, he filmed a “No Veteran Ever Dies” short video.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:  
BRADLEY G. PHILLIPS

CHIEF OF OPERATIONS:  
JAMES A. SPAULDING

**326** DISTRICT EMPLOYEES

**19** NATIONAL CEMETERIES

**24** STATE AND TRIBAL CEMETERIES

**\$57** MILLION DISTRICT BUDGET

**34,440** ANNUAL INTERMENTS

## MIDWEST

MIDWEST NO VETERAN EVER DIES  
SEPTEMBER 26, 2018

Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery, with assistance from Dignity Memorial and the Missing in America Project, honored seven Veterans and three Veteran spouses. The Wilmington VFW, Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery Memorial Squad, Patriot Guard Riders, Freedom Riders and members of the Army, Navy and Air Force provided military honors with a three-rifle volley salute, live TAPS, and a presentation by all service branches in attendance. The flag detail folded and presented seven burial flags to members of the Missing in America Project. Retired Army Colonel Eugene Scott spoke at the event.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:  
JOSH DELEON

CHIEF OF OPERATIONS:  
SONG YI

**312** DISTRICT EMPLOYEES

**27** NATIONAL CEMETERIES

**24** STATE AND TRIBAL CEMETERIES

**\$43** MILLION DISTRICT BUDGET

**28,789** ANNUAL INTERMENTS

## CONTINENTAL

CONTINENTAL NO VETERAN EVER DIES  
SEPTEMBER 5, 2018

A group of motorcyclists rode from Bethany, Oklahoma to Fort Sill National Cemetery as part of the Rolls to Wreaths Honor Ride. The proceeds from the ride were used to purchase wreaths that were placed on headstones in the winter. The group also placed honorary coins on Veterans' headstones.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:  
STEVEN P. BEST

CHIEF OF OPERATIONS:  
SARA J. ELTON

**254** DISTRICT EMPLOYEES

**20** NATIONAL CEMETERIES

**21** STATE AND TRIBAL CEMETERIES

**\$33** MILLION DISTRICT BUDGET

**21,548** ANNUAL INTERMENTS

## NORTH ATLANTIC

NORTH ATLANTIC NO VETERAN EVER DIES  
OCTOBER 22, 2018

The Massachusetts National Cemetery in Bourne interred the remains of Navy Veteran Water Tender 1st Class, Stephen Pepe after the Defense POW/MIA Agency (DPAA) identified his remains. Pepe was one of the hundreds of sailors and Marines who died aboard the USS Oklahoma following the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor. Flags were lowered to half-staff in Connecticut from sunrise to sunset in honor of Pepe. Over seven decades have passed since he gave his life for his country. He was finally returned home to his family and received a burial of dignity, honor, and respect.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:  
W. CLYDE MARSH

CHIEF OF OPERATIONS:  
MARIA GARZA

**323** DISTRICT EMPLOYEES

**38** NATIONAL CEMETERIES

**28** STATE AND TRIBAL CEMETERIES

**\$50** MILLION DISTRICT BUDGET

**21,493** ANNUAL INTERMENTS

“The most important thing we do at the National Cemetery Administration is ensuring the Veterans of this great Nation are never forgotten. That their stories live on and their legacies never die.”

Randy C. Reeves Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs



## SOUTHEAST

### SOUTHEAST NO VETERAN EVER DIES AUGUST 11, 2018

The Support Committee for the Alabama National Cemetery (ANC) held a “Keep the Spirit of ’45” Alive event to honor Veterans from World War II. The event featured a procession of World War II Veterans escorted into the ceremony. Other participants were family members of World War II Veterans being honored. In 2010, Congress passed a resolution designating the second Sunday in August as “Spirit of ’45 Day” recognizing the official end of World War II.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:**  
STEPHAN FRANK

**CHIEF OF OPERATIONS:**  
JAMES TAFT

**303** DISTRICT EMPLOYEES

**32** NATIONAL CEMETERIES

**15** STATE AND TRIBAL CEMETERIES

**\$47** MILLION DISTRICT BUDGET

**29,036** ANNUAL INTERMENTS

## VA ADVISORY COMMITTEE SHARES NCA “NO VETERAN EVER DIES” VISION



The Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials advises VA Leadership on the maintenance and operations of the national, state, and tribal Veteran cemeteries. The committee meets twice annually (Spring and Fall) to discuss matters of importance to Veterans, family members, and survivors. The committee is currently chaired by Brigadier General Leslie E. Beavers, USA (Retired), and has eleven other members with diverse backgrounds and expertise. In 2018, they submitted recommendations for improvements at the National Cemetery Scheduling Office, streamlining of Pre-Need Eligibility Determinations, and was instrumental in the design and implementation of the Medal of Honor medallion. The committee conducted three site visits, to include the Congressional Cemetery (Private); Fort Logan National Cemetery (Open); and Pikes Peak National Cemetery (New). They also visited the University of Denver in Colorado to observe exhibits of the Veterans Legacy Program. The committee embraces NCA’s vision of ensuring that “No Veteran Ever Dies.” For more information about the Advisory Committee, please visit: [https://www.va.gov/ADVISORY/Advisory\\_Committee\\_on\\_Cemeteries\\_and\\_Memorials.asp](https://www.va.gov/ADVISORY/Advisory_Committee_on_Cemeteries_and_Memorials.asp)



### MOROVIS NATIONAL CEMETERY, PUERTO RICO

By the end of FY2018, the National Cemetery Administration’s (NCA) 136 VA national cemeteries, along with state and tribal Veterans cemeteries across the nation, Puerto Rico, and Guam provided burial access to 92% of eligible Veterans and their families. That’s over 18 million Veterans. NCA’s goal by 2021 is 95% burial access.

To accomplish this goal, NCA has plans to open more VA national cemeteries and continue to support state and tribal Veteran’s cemeteries through the Veterans Cemetery Grants Program. Burial access is critical to customer satisfaction and a key component to ensure that “No Veteran Ever Dies.”




In Puerto Rico, with no more expansion possible at Puerto Rico National Cemetery in Bayamon, NCA chose Morovis as a site to meet future burial needs. This 247-acre site was selected from over 20 candidate sites. The cemetery visitation experience will be a beautifully maintained park-like setting with an avenue of flags, cortege lane, Administration building, flag assembly, and a maintenance area. A phasing plan for Morovis will be developed over a 10-year period and will account for 100 years of burial capacity.


**NCA defines burial access  
as having a national,  
state, or tribal Veterans  
cemetery within 75 miles  
of a Veteran’s home.**





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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
National Cemetery Administration

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